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First Committee

17th Meeting

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New York

Chairman: Mr. Valencia Rodriguez . . . . . (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Agenda item 73

Rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee (A/49/579)

Exchange of views

The Chairman *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I should like to recall that the Committee has made tremendous efforts with regard to the agenda item now before us. The work undertaken by Ambassador von Wagner — Chairman of the Committee at its forty-eighth session — which culminated in the adoption of decision 48/499 was a valuable contribution in this respect. Secondly, resolution 48/87 has been the basic guideline for the Committee in considering this item and pursuing its work, since it established the ten broad topic areas and at the same time instructed the Chairman of the First Committee on how to conduct the consultations on the subsequent rationalization of the work of the Committee with a view to improving its effectiveness.

On the basis of these efforts and in accordance with the aforementioned decision and resolution, in the course of its consideration at this session of the items relating to disarmament and international security, the Committee embarked on an exercise with three basic phases: firstly, a general debate; secondly, structured discussions in informal meetings on specific topics in the thematic approach to the items on disarmament and international security; and, lastly, the adoption of decisions on all the draft resolutions relating to the above-mentioned items.

The view of many delegations, as far as I can tell, indicates that the second phase — based on the experience we have acquired — should be designed to make it easier for delegations to prepare their draft resolutions because the general debate should be aimed at determining the delegations' positions and at assisting them to gauge where the common ground and the difficulties lie in respect of the main questions on the Committee's agenda.

Delegations are now called on to give their assessments of the results of this first attempt. The basic aim is to ensure that the Committee performs its important functions in the most effective manner possible because the items on its agenda unquestionably have implications for fundamental aspects of the maintenance of international peace and security. In pursuit of this aim, the Committee must endeavour to make efficient use of the time and the resources available to it, namely, the conference services. I have no doubt that using conference services efficiently will ensure that the Committee performs more effectively.

Members of the Committee have before them the following documents for the consideration of this item: A/C.1/48/L.59, A/48/688/Add.1, and A/49/579. In addition, I should point out that those delegations represented on the Bureau are studying the possibility of, at a later stage, presenting a draft resolution on this issue.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): The question of rationalization is obviously a subject to which the First Committee has devoted great attention over the past few years, in an effort not only to engage in self-examination but also to try to see how the Committee can better adapt itself to a changing world in which change is important and profound but not

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yet complete. Obviously, rationalization cannot be a one-off exercise. It must be conducted over a period of time, with the results being checked and evaluated and constant readjustments made every year. Tribute should be paid, Mr. Chairman, to your predecessor Ambassador von Wagner, who, with his customary energy and structured approach, forced the Committee to consider ideas and to move forward and to do so in fact at a pace much faster than is customary for this Committee, and then it would have been without the momentum he generated personally in this exercise.

We will, of course, be hearing the general views of all our colleagues but, in the interests of brevity, perhaps you will allow me, Sir, to go straight to the paper that I understand some members of the Bureau have prepared, and of which some copies are mysteriously available in this room. I would, of course, suggest that the quicker this paper is placed on everybody's desk, the more objective-oriented our discussion will be. I say this because at first sight it reads like a very good paper. It is a well-informed document and we think that by going into its specifics we can move forward at some speed. In considering the ideas which interested delegations will put forward on this paper or have put forward in this paper, we must of course discuss our evaluation of what has been called the "structured discussion" of specific items, an experiment that was conducted for the first time this year. The experiment has been only a qualified success. There were times when great interest was generated and there were other times when slots were very empty. I would imagine that that is part of what can be expected when one is doing an exercise for the first time, but the important point is that it is really much too early to reach any final evaluation on the concept of "structured discussion" on specific items. I think we should continue to do this for another year or two and try to evaluate it only after seeing how it performs at different times and in different years. The idea is good. The idea of informal consultations is, in fact, essential to the work of the First Committee. Perhaps the use of the word "structured" gave the wrong impression to people, and whenever the final resolution is considered, I would submit that we should consider whether the word "structured" should be used or not, or whether some softer, low-key terminology could be used in the interests of highlighting the informal nature of the discussions rather than their "structured" nature.

Those informal discussions are going to be very vital next year, which will be a time of deep movement, doubt and self-examination. As members know, among the draft resolutions which we will be considering in the First Committee this year is the proposal for a special session on disarmament in 1996. That proposal itself arises from the feeling of many delegations that the time is slowly approaching when we will have to ask questions such as what direction is disarmament taking? What is the agenda for the next decade or decades? How is that agenda to be defined? In what forum should the discussions take place? How, for example, are security matters to be considered along with disarmament matters? How important is security in the disarmament framework? What exactly does security mean?

These are deep questions, which the First Committee has to consider and decide upon. This cannot be done in formal sessions. Initially, it can be done only in informal sessions, which is why the essence of next year's work will lie in the informal sessions.

In past discussions in the informal sessions here, my delegation has also had occasion to point out that the format of this particular Room is not conducive to a proper, considered informal discussion. This Room, in which most of us are looking at other people's backs while others are trying to save their backs from the people behind them, is, as I said, not conducive to informal discussion, which requires a degree of face-to-face eye contact, which, unfortunately, is not possible in Conference Room 4. My delegation has had occasion to point this out to the Committee and to request that additional conference room facilities be sought. Unfortunately, whenever the matter has come up, we have found that additional conference room facilities were not available because they had already been allocated to other users.

We have managed to bumble along this year but I do not think that we will be able to do so next year, which is why markers have to be placed, as of now, to ensure that, at next year's session of the First Committee, additional conference and office room space is available to the First Committee for informal work.

Concerning the paper itself, which I presume delegations will see, I would therefore request the incorporation of three ideas. The first is to consider whether the word "structured" might not be softened in some way, because it gives the wrong impression.

Secondly, when we talk of the establishment of deadlines — and we know that this is a problem, it came up this year, when there was a constant backwards movement of deadlines because they were cutting into the informal discussion itself — I think that we should clearly choose

and establish deadlines that come only after the informal discussions are over. It should be made clear in the wording that we are not saying that deadlines should be set once the informal discussions are over; no, the choice should be made earlier, but it should be such that the deadlines fall only after the informal discussions have taken place, and preferably on Mondays, because it helps to have a weekend in between.

Thirdly, an operative paragraph which, I am sure, will discuss ways and means and resources, should clearly mention the need for additional conference room space. You can go ahead and request either "additional conference room space for informal meetings" or simply "additional conference room space", but those four words should figure in any operative paragraph that addresses ways and means and resources.

The Chairman (*interpretation from Spanish*): As I have stated, the members of the Bureau have been paying particular attention to the possibility of submitting a draft resolution on this issue to the Committee. As of now, the draft is still under discussion, but I see no problem in requesting the Secretary to circulate it informally because, as I said, it has yet to be formally submitted to the Committee. Informal consideration of the document, however, might shed some light on this item and assist us in considering it.

Mr. Marín Bosch (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for having convened this meeting on the rationalization of the work of the First Committee. We believe that it is very timely. We are also grateful to you for your clear introduction of the item.

The First Committee has before it many and very various issues of great importance to the international community and the Committee's history teaches us that it is not possible to reach agreement on all the items on its agenda, but that what we can do — or at least attempt to do — is to understand the positions of the various groups or individual delegations better. That is why we believe that the process that began many years ago — but which received a major impulse last year under the chairmanship of Ambassador Adolf von Wagner of Germany — must continue. As the representative of Pakistan has just said, we must keep this process under constant review in this forum.

The important thing is to inject greater dynamism into our work and, above all, better focus it to avoid any undue waste of time. As members have seen this year, there have been many meetings and many hours spent in vain in the First Committee. What, then, have we learned and what could we do to improve our work?

As I said, we need to make our discussions more dynamic. Up to now, we have had two very clearly defined phases: a general debate, which is less a debate than a series of monologues, and decision-making on draft resolutions, the contents of some of which, unfortunately, have not enjoyed the in-depth discussion warranted by the importance of the items they cover. This year, we have begun what we call the third phase, the so-called "structured discussion". As the Chairman and Ambassador Kamal have rightly pointed out, this has also been a repetition of the series of monologues heard in the general debate.

My impression, after many years of participating in the work of the First Committee, is that we lack an initial phase, one that should occur before the general debate. I would venture to suggest for representatives' consideration the following idea: we should have a kind of "warm-up week". Instead of arriving here and embarking on the general debate on the very first day, we would have a week of meetings in which the various groups or delegations could report and present their ideas on what they want the First Committee to do that year.

Ideas could be put forward, for example, such as those presented by the Non-Aligned Movement concerning the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Ideas might be presented on some of the draft resolutions that are new this year. That would help us, firstly, to get an idea of the direction in which the discussion is going, and then the general debate to be held the following week would be little less lumbering and, most importantly, be better informed about what we are doing in the First Committee.

As members know, what happens now is that we come here and many of us — and I include myself in this — rehearse our speeches of last year on the various items and there is very little new we can put in. The general debate would be much less lumbering if we had "warm-up week" I referred to.

However, we also need to find a way to encourage greater informality in our work. We need to find a way — and I think Pakistan's proposal on this is a good one — to meet in rooms where it is possible to have a full and easy exchange of opinions. So, in the text that the Bureau is apparently preparing, I would ask that consideration be given to the possibility of including a fourth, initial phase

of very informal exchanges of views about the intentions of delegations for that particular session of the General Assembly. This would avoid, among other things, the useless repetition of some resolutions — fortunately this is happening less often — in the Committee, and would make delegations much more careful about what kinds of proposal they put to the Committee.

Mr. Ramaker (Netherlands): Like the two previous speakers I wish to thank you, Sir, for calling this meeting on — as the title of the document (A/49/579) that you quoted states — "Rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee". We think that indeed this meeting is very timely and that it is quite useful to discuss here today, in a brainstorming session, how to improve our working methods.

Indeed, this meeting this morning and, I hope, also this afternoon, will take place under the guise of revitalizing our work, increasing its effectiveness and making it, where possible, more rational and more effective: in other words, making the Committee an ideal forum in which, at the end of the day, we would come to a number of decisions.

We think that it is important for the First Committee to organize its work in such a way that the outcome — because, in the end, that is what counts — is the optimal result. As Ambassador Marín Bosch said, we cannot agree on everything but at least we should not leave any avenue unexplored in reaching the best result possible. For that we have to look closely at the way we work.

Like many other delegations, we see value in the general debate but we also see that the general debate has, over the years, become a series of monologues; not unimportant monologues, because they highlight the positions of delegations, but nevertheless they are only a beginning. So, what is needed in addition to the general debate, is another method of work that would give the maximum opportunity to delegations to talk to each other, to consult, to refer to capitals if necessary, but at any rate to make sure that there are no misunderstandings on where delegations or groups of delegations stand. In this way we could also prevent the surprises that sometimes arise and that could be avoided by having this type of consultation taking place.

This year we have had the first experience of another method of organizing our work, namely, the three-phase approach with the middle phase being the "structured" informal discussions, as they were called. We have not yet reached a final conclusion on whether these discussions were useful or on what precisely was their purpose. Nevertheless, we, like previous speakers, are inclined to a favourable position on this method of work. We also think that it is too early to make a final judgement. As with other subjects in multilateral diplomacy, things take their time, and that is certainly true of changes in working habits that have existed for so long in a Committee, such as the First Committee, that has its own traditions.

Indeed, we think that it is too early for final conclusions on these informal, "structured" discussions. It seems to us that in principle they offer a very valuable vehicle for, as I said earlier, making sure that delegations know from each other exactly where they stand, what their positions are, where the flexibility is, where they can accommodate the concerns of others, and where their vital interests emerge and are at stake, so that in the end such discussions will enable us to get the maximum result from the First Committee that can be reached.

When it comes to the rationalization of our work, we hope that the Committee will find a way. We think rationalization serves a valuable purpose and, like the Ambassador of Pakistan, we think that additional conference services, in the form of a conference room that would allow for a really informal exchange of views and for informal consultations, would be worth considering. Our delegation, and I am sure the same goes for other delegations, operates under the general instruction that such services should be provided within the financial means that are available, but I think they could be accommodated. I wholeheartedly endorse the suggestion by the Ambassador of Pakistan to look into the possibility of giving the Committee extra conference facilities.

I should also like to address, for a moment, the scheduling of our meetings. As Ambassador Marín Bosch, I believe, said, we should also see where we can make better use of our time. Going by our experience this year, I do note that there are certain gaps in our schedule that are not being used to the fullest for informal consultations simply because delegations are scattered all over New York in their respective Missions. I think that this is a problem that may not be an easy one to solve, but we should address it. The First Committee, as it works now, is of course also something like a marketplace for ideas and initiatives, and we should see to it that we make use of that function of the First Committee to the fullest extent possible.

In conclusion, we look back on this year's new working methods with feelings that may be a little mixed but, on the other hand, tend very much towards the positive. We do think that we are on the right track when it comes to creating conditions whereby we arrive at a fuller understanding of where we stand on the various issues — and, indeed, they are very varied — that we have before us in the First Committee.

Mr. Salmi (Finland): We believe that the rationalization of the work of the First Committee should be continued. In this connection, I should like to thank you personally, Mr. Chairman, and, through you, the Bureau, for the efforts you have made to implement some of the results of our consultations at the last session.

I should like to say a few words about the general framework. We do not see rationalization as a question concerning just one Committee, just one group of experts, but as part of a wider effort to strengthen and revitalize the General Assembly. Strengthening the ability of the First Committee to deal with current issues would enhance the role of the General Assembly in general as the central organ of the United Nations system. The natural aim should therefore be to restore the role of the First Committee as the main political committee of the General Assembly, as it was conceived to be.

As part of the rationalization effort, we also support a review of the disarmament agenda. So far, this review has not received the attention it deserves, and I have therefore listened with great interest to what has been said on this issue. Instead of dealing with a number of obsolete items on the current agenda and draft resolutions that are repeated from one year to another, the First Committee should be able to focus on tasks that truly contribute to international peace and security in today's world. These should cover both disarmament issues and security issues of a broader nature.

General Assembly resolution 48/87 adopted last year outlined a new structure for the Committee's work. This trial year has proved that this path is worth pursuing. In our further work we should remember that the aim of the thematic approach was not to duplicate lengthy statements in which well-known positions are repeated year after year. To the contrary, the aim was to move from that kind of general debate into a more lively exchange of views. We hope that the time used for the traditional type of general debate can be further shortened.

Naturally, the thematic part of the First Committee's work needs to be developed on the basis of this year's experience. Next year, we hope to have a more focused debate on key issues. The thematic discussion should also be seen as preparing the ground for the consideration of draft resolutions.

We regard rationalization work as a continuing and evolving process. Step by step, in many daily management issues, the role of the Chairman of the Committee and the other Bureau members, as well as that of the secretariat, are important. But the Committee as a whole should be ready to show leadership by taking decisions when they are needed.

We welcome, at this juncture, the initiative of taking decisions on rationalization at this year's General Assembly session, and we hope that this will represent a further step in the ongoing rationalization process.

Mr. Stelzer (Austria): I should like to join previous speakers in thanking you, Mr. Chairman, for having convened this meeting and, expressing our gratitude for your setting the agenda in such an articulate manner.

I do agree with what has been said by previous speakers, namely, that the process of rationalization is a gradual one, a step-by-step one. Every year, we try to improve the work of the First Committee, within the limits of consensus. Last year, as has been pointed out, was a very important one: we had substantive consultations on the rationalization of work, and although we could not reach consensus on a draft resolution, we were able to arrive at a broad common denominator in terms of the structure our work is to follow.

My delegation would like to commend you, Mr. Chairman, for taking the ideas put forward during last year's consultations into consideration when defining this year's work, when you put some of the consensus ideas expressed last year through a kind of a trial run.

As has already been pointed out, it might be too early to draw definite conclusions on the value of how we have been approaching this new structure this year. We seem to be in agreement that more time is needed for intensive and focused consultations on the items under consideration and for a really focused and "structured" discussion. When we approached phase two, the structured debate, many delegations had very different views on how it should be handled: whether it should complement the first phase, of general debate, or whether it should rather play, into the

third phase, consideration of the specific draft resolutions that will be submitted.

My delegations has views on how this process has worked this year, and they are more positive than those of earlier speakers. We have the feeling that the general debate this year was more structured: quite a few of the statements were more precise, shorter, more focused. Of course, there were a lot of repetitions. Although the world is changing, not everything is changing; some things stay the same, by which we mean things in the general debate. But we feel that there has been an improvement here too.

Many delegations participated in the "structured" discussion during the second phase. Even here, we noted some repetition and some restatement of old positions. But, at the same time, there were quite a few very frank statements that touched on issues that were close to delegations' interests. The second phase could thus fulfil the expectations of quite a few different schools of thought in the Committee. It could complement the first phase, in that we continue focusing on a few items close to our hearts and to our interests. At the same time, these items lead into the third phase, because the draft resolutions reflect the items to which we pay greater attention. Hence, this "structured" debate could serve as an excellent bridge between the first and third phases.

You, Mr. Chairman, referred to a paper setting out the efforts of the Bureau to draw conclusions from the work of the first phase of this session's debate. I believe the paper has just been distributed, and I thank you, Sir, for making it available. The paper seems to be a very cautious, conservative effort to take stock of what has happened as a result of last year's consultations and of a certain common denominator in this year's work thus far. It seems not to preclude further development and takes very good account of the gradual approach and of the dynamic process of rationalization, as it has been described during this meeting.

My delegation agrees that we should speak of a phased approach. The three-phase approach we defined last year turned out to be very difficult to put into practice, so it might be better to speak only of a "phased approach" without defining it or limiting it to a certain number of phases, because in fact we have more than three phases: we have the general debate; we have the structured discussion; we have the consideration of all draft resolutions; we have action on the draft resolutions; then, of course, we have the last phase, the question of Antarctica.

We devote considerable interest to the second phase, the "structured" discussion. While "structured", it is not supposed to limit delegations. "Structured" means that we adopt a thematic approach, as we did this year, proceeding item by item pursuant to resolution 48/87, in which we subsumed all relevant items under 10 headings. Thus, the course of discussion becomes predictable; delegations can prepare themselves to a certain degree and respond to statements made by other delegations in the informal discussion. We also support an informal mode of discussion, with conference services provided. We greatly appreciate the fact that no records are taken, so that the discussion is stimulated.

We also give attention to the proper environment. Some previous speakers thought that it might be better to go to a smaller meeting room. Our experience this year shows that there was a lot of interest in the second phase, so much interest that we could not possibly have moved to a smaller room, for no such room could have accommodated all interested delegations. Hence, there are logistic limitations. This informal mode should be made use of and expanded in coming years.

The draft resolution, which has been distributed in preliminary form, avoids micro-management of the work of the First Committee. It focuses on the most important points — on the structure – without preventing incoming Chairmen in succeeding years from adding their own ideas or from exploiting their prerogative of suggesting the structure of the Committee's work, within the terms of the structure outlined in the draft resolution.

One paragraph, however, reflects some of our experiences of this year. For example, it expresses the conviction that statements in the general debate should be more structured, more precise, more concise; it does not limit statements to a certain number of minutes, but only recommends that statements should not exceed a certain time limit. This might help structure the debate a little better.

The draft also refers to holding the second-phase meetings in an informal mode but with appropriate conference services, and to structuring the discussion according to broad topic areas listed in resolution 48/87. It refers also to a deadline for the submission of draft resolutions; this year, we found that we had to postpone the deadline, because the original deadline cut through the second phase. As Ambassador Kamal pointed out, the deadline should be after the end of the second phase. Here, we do think that paragraph 4 (c) of the draft should be

slightly reworded, because it says that the deadline should be "established". What the draft means, of course, is that the deadline should be fixed for after the end of the second phase, so, as suggested by Ambassador Kamal, better drafting is called for.

The draft also recommends that the consideration of all draft resolutions should follow the same clustering into broad topic areas as was adopted for the second phase. This reflects the dynamics of our work.

Another paragraph urges the Secretary-General to provide, taking into account existing resource constraints, the appropriate means for the work programme of the fiftieth session; it does not speak of additional conference space, but as has been pointed out, it might be appropriate to add such a reference. We could certainly support the suggested reference to

> "appropriate means, additional conference space, and resources to permit the implementation of the work programme for the fiftieth session of the First Committee".

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having made the effort to give delegations the opportunity to express their thoughts regarding rationalization in the context of a dynamic process, and for having taken it upon yourself to formulate the experience of last year and this year in a preliminary draft resolution and to present the draft to the Committee. Not only do we support the draft but, as a member of the Bureau, we have joined in sponsoring it.

Mr. Poptchev (Bulgaria): My delegation too would like to contribute to this useful exchange on the issue of the rationalization of the work of the First Committee. As we have previously stated, the practice of clustering agenda items has proved to be an appropriate step. The "three-phase" approach to structuring the work of the Committee has been accepted by delegations as a natural and logical one, and our work has consequently developed in an orderly, smooth fashion.

On the other hand, my delegation believes that certain further improvements could be considered. In this context, we would like to point to the failure by the Committee to address certain "key questions" within each of the major topic areas, as envisaged in the preliminary draft resolution.

Firstly, we think that had the "structured" discussion been set out in detail, the Committee could have considered, within the topic of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, questions such as the scope of the ban, the structure and functioning of the implementing organization and the composition of its executive council. In suggesting this, we do not mean to involve the First Committee in negotiations — which are the prerogative of the Conference on Disarmament — but rather to stimulate political support and to enlarge the conceptual understanding of future disarmament and arms-control agreements and other major arms-control and disarmament issues.

Disarmament conventions are becoming ever more complex and elaborate. They are also intended to be instruments that have universal adherence, and so political support for and understanding of these conventions by States that are not directly involved in the negotiations is a particular necessity. The discussion of relevant "key questions" in the First Committee presents a good opportunity for a further attempt to coordinate the political will of States on major political issues and to broaden the intellectual basis and universality of disarmament instruments. In short, we find the consideration of the so-called "key questions" useful.

Secondly, in terms of possible improvements, my delegation would bring to the Committee's attention the possibility of introducing a period of one or two days of consultations, not only on draft resolutions and decisions, but also on general trends and developments in the arms-control area. This suggested consultation period should be scheduled between the second and the third phases of the Committee's present timetable.

The third point my delegation wishes to make is related to the overall status of disarmament machinery. It is, by all accounts, undergoing a transformation, this is only natural, as international relations themselves are in a state of flux. We should therefore not be too ambitious in seeking rationalization of the First Committee on its own: the international community has not yet found the best organizational approach to the effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament and of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. We would therefore submit that the arms-control and disarmament community should apply an integrated approach to the issue of rationalization of the work of the disarmament machinery as a whole. This should be reflected in the agenda of the First Committee and in today's discussion of the issue.

Mr. King (United States of America): On behalf of my delegation also, I should like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening today's meeting. This is, in

effect, the first chance we have had to review the results of the rationalization exercise undertaken as a result of last year's Assembly resolution 48/87.

The major new factor in that rationalization was the phased approach to our work, especially the addition of the new phase on "structured" debate. Frankly, my delegation has found the results far more useful than we had expected. If there are, perhaps, problems in this area, they are attributable to the newness of the experiment itself and to the fact that delegations need to see how it works in principle before they can begin to improve their own methods of contributing to the debate. In that sense, my delegation is prepared to work further to enhance the usability of the debate phase.

We also need to test further the other rationalization ideas that have been mentioned. The idea of trying to make our conference space more amenable to informal discussions is indeed a good one. A smaller conference space would, of course, carry with it the problems other speakers have mentioned, such as the fact that it might not accommodate the members interested in this kind of discussion. What we may need to think about, therefore, is not so much a smaller conference room, but some way, if it is possible, physically to reconfigure the room we have in order to accommodate those who wish to have a more informal discussion but without the squeezing, difficulty in hearing and other problems that occur in an overcrowded facility.

I think also that we need to consider another idea that has already been mentioned: added flexibility in scheduling our meetings. In this sense, I believe that the Bureau needs to be able to adapt much more quickly to the Committee's changing needs for discussion. Our workload during any given year seems to have peaks and nodes of work, and the meeting schedule has to be adapted to that. For that reason, I think that the idea of giving more authority to the Bureau to schedule these meetings, which I saw expressed in the preliminary draft resolution that was just distributed, is a good one.

In any case, I think it is important not to overload the rationalization agenda. As another speaker mentioned, we should not let rationalization of the First Committee become a substitute for our inability to rationalize the substance of disarmament, because there are no structural modifications that we can make to the First Committee that could compensate for our lack of ability to agree on the disarmament issues, needs and priorities that we face. If we could do that, I believe that the organization and structure of the First Committee would easily follow.

We would therefore agree with previous speakers to move forward with deliberations on the rationalization ideas that have been submitted. We need especially further to test the idea of an issue-based debate. It shows real promise in doing something very important: bridging the gap between the formal debate structure that we have in the first phase and the very informal hallway, coffee-room negotiation of resolutions. This additional phase shows an ability to improve both communication and understanding on the specific issues we face.

Lastly, having taken just an initial look at the preliminary draft resolution that the Bureau has put out, our impression is that, at first glance, it seems to fit the spirit of the rationalization discussion that we are having now. This draft may indeed become a good basis for further discussion, and we also hope that it might be used as the basis this year for a final First Committee resolution on rationalization.

Mr. Chandra (India): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank you, Sir, for having initiated the discussion on this subject. We would also like to avail ourselves of this opportunity to thank Ambassador von Wagner for having started us on this exercise.

I should particularly like to thank you also, Sir, for the papers that you have circulated on these matters. We agree with the broad thrust of the paper on rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee that has been circulated. Together with the previous speakers who share this view, I agree that it represents the spirit of what we are trying to do.

I also agree with previous speakers that we need to keep this item under constant review and keep upgrading our thinking and comments on the matter. We should, however, ensure that, in terms of agenda items, the priorities set out at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament are kept in mind.

Turning to this year's experience, it is our feeling that the informal debate was not as successful as we had hoped. Perhaps that is because our expectations were so high, but it is a fact that during that phase the exchanges had some sparkle. It is our feeling that we should continue in that mode and that, with experience, performance will improve considerably and this particular sector of the session will perhaps become one of the most useful. We therefore feel

that it is an area that should be retained. We agree with the idea expressed by some delegations that we should perhaps give it a soft cover and not call it "structured". However, let us explore these ideas.

Basically, as my delegation sees it, there are four phases: the opening debate, the informal debate, the consideration of resolutions and action taken.

Regarding the opening debate, I am greatly attracted by the idea put forward by Ambassador Bosch that there should be a warm-up. I think that cold starts are bad, and therefore the warm-up idea is attractive. However, I wonder whether we would have sufficient time in that phase to have simultaneous action along the lines that Ambassador Bosch suggested, namely, to have the debate and the statements and, at the same time, have group meetings where issues are discussed and ideas exchanged. That in turn would provide a natural feed-in to the next phase — the informal debate. In the informal debate, apart from exchanges in the way to which we have been accustomed, perhaps that phase could be utilized for resolution-building and consensus-forming, and then flow in naturally to the third and fourth phases.

These are some of our very preliminary thoughts, about areas that I feel should be looked at carefully. We would certainly like to see the idea of the informal debate retained, keeping in mind that arrangements should be made for conference rooms that would accommodate most of the delegations. We attach particular importance to this.

As regards the deadlines question, we feel that deadlines should of course follow the informal debates because we regard that period as providing an input for the resolutions that are being proposed.

Mr. Arnhold (Germany): First of all, my delegation would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and all the delegations involved in producing the preliminary draft resolution on the rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee for their efforts.

With a draft of this kind, we feel we are really on the right track, that is, establishing a pattern that will make it clear that the rationalization of the work of the Committee is a continuing, ongoing process; the draft will certainly help us keep this issue to the forefront of our words and help prepare us for next year.

When we consider the rationalization process and its objective, we must certainly take into account what our experiences were before we started the process and recall what misgivings we had then. Those misgivings focused in particular on the fact that, between the general debate and the voting period, we had a period that was not really filled by substance but only by informal consultations on draft resolutions, and no draft resolutions were discussed in detail in the Committee *per se*.

We started this year with the right approach — a "structured" discussion — but we are all aware that we are far from finding the ideal solution. An ideal solution is not something we can achieve by procedure alone, and we must be aware of the fact that we, ourselves, the delegations, are the ones who must contribute to making the debate lively, to making it a debate that will help us to find solutions for certain draft resolutions. In essence, drawing from the initial experiences we had this year — which were encouraging in some areas but not so satisfying in others — we must be aware that making this phase more effective entails preparing for it when it comes round again next year.

As we all know, the ways in which delegations will prepare for the phase will differ because delegations have different patterns regarding the way they receive instructions and the degree of latitude they have on certain issues. Delegations that are bound by written instructions might have to try to get written instructions on certain issues for the "structure" phase, and others that have more latitude should be encouraged to use it to develop common positions during that phase.

We particularly welcome the operative paragraphs of the draft that make it quite clear that we are in an ongoing, continuing process and that we will look into the matter against next year.

We thank the Bureau for its efforts and hope that the preliminary draft resolution will result in a draft resolution that will be adopted without a vote.

Mr. Westdal (Canada): I join with previous speakers in thanking you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Bureau for the time, effort and imagination that I know you are bringing to the task of rationalizing the work and reforming the agenda of our Committee.

I too would say that our experience this year has been mixed. It may not have lived up to some expectations. It is true that we have had a series of monologues and it is also true that we have had some rehearsals of formal statements

from the general debate but, at the same time, we have also had some illuminating and more spontaneous exchanges.

Change in the multilateral field takes time, and we think that this experiment should continue. I am hopeful that next year, and beyond, our informal debate will be more fruitful as delegations become accustomed to change as they come to the New York prepared for such informal debates.

I would endorse the remarks made about the need for a setting more conducive to dynamic, informal discussions. Some room other than this one would be much more conducive to that end and would provide a setting more like that of working groups focused on specific subjects.

I would also endorse as quite intriguing the proposals that were made by Ambassador Marín Bosch for an informal warm-up session that would enable us to describe our intentions before having to address a written text and for a setting that would enable us to discuss ideas, particularly new ideas "and new suggestions" rather than being bound to written and prepared remarks about proposals that had already found expression in formal resolutions.

Finally, I think all these changes would contribute to the achievement of a long-standing Canadian objective which I know is shared by many delegations — namely, to better integrate the work of the First Committee into the broader international security agenda so as to deepen our understanding of the concepts of preventive diplomacy, confidence-building and post-conflict peace-preserving measures, and also of peace-keeping more generally.

Mr. Moradi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation joins previous speakers in thanking you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this meeting on the rationalization of the work of the First Committee. I will limit my comments to the subject of the week which has been allocated to the "structured discussion" of specific items and to the preliminary draft resolution distributed a little while ago.

As some delegations have mentioned, the results of the "structured" discussion of specific items were not as satisfactory or as productive as we had anticipated. However, it was worthwhile, and, as Ambassador Kamal suggested, perhaps we should continue with it for one or two more years and then conduct an evaluation.

Moreover, we think more participation should be encouraged in the "structured" discussion of specific items, and perhaps delegations should also be encouraged to bring their draft resolutions before the First Committee during that period so that informal consultations on them can be conducted and subsequent meetings can be more productive. We are convinced that, if the draft resolutions were discussed in that week, we would have less controversy over their substance later in the work of the First Committee.

We also support the idea expressed by Ambassador Kamal on the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions, which would follow the second stage of the work of the First Committee — that is, the informal week. The idea expressed by Ambassador Marín Bosch on a warm-up week was also interesting, but we think that if the general debate followed the warm-up week, it would become less interesting, more monotonous. Despite that, we think the idea is worth examining, and perhaps in due course we should consider the merits of Ambassador Marín Bosch's proposal.

As to the preliminary draft resolution just distributed, we have given it some preliminary consideration and it seems to be balanced. However, we would like to refer to one or two minor points in the preliminary draft.

In the draft, where the General Assembly recognizes the need to allow more time during the annual sessions of the First Committee to conduct intensive and focused consultations on the items under its consideration, we think we should replace the notion of "more" with, perhaps "adequate", because we are of the view that, with fewer formal meetings, fewer delegations will find it possible to attend the Committee's meetings, and then the Committee is deprived of hearing their views on the issues involved. This was the case with the week allocated to the informal general debate in this session. The small delegations, especially, find it difficult to attend informal meetings.

At the point in the preliminary draft where the General Assembly requests the incoming Chairman of the First Committee to continue consultations, we wonder whether this recommendation precludes the possibility of further consultations under the auspices of the current Chairman, such as have been held in previous years.

Mr. Dembinski (Poland): I think that this debate has been extremely useful, and I would like to thank the Bureau for the thoughtful preliminary draft resolution we have just received.

I would just like to make a few remarks concerning two words which are used in this text. First is the word "structure". The work of the First Committee has been "structured" or divided, into four distinct phases, which is extremely useful approach to organization. But the real innovation lies in the introduction of the second phase, which is called a "structured" discussion. I think it should not really be a "structured" discussion — and that word has already been criticized by some speakers — it should be called, rather, a "thematic" discussion. I think that, rather than discussing specific issues, in the second phase we should discuss broader themes.

The second word which I think is very important is the word "informal". What do we mean by "informal"? Of course, the seating arrangements are a physical part of the informality of discussions, but having a freer discussion means not only having statements of the precise positions of Governments, but also having some new ideas, and to achieve this freer exchange of views I think we should take a further step and have the informal discussion introduced by informal statements so that discussion would be stimulated.

Probably it is not for the Chairman of the Committee to put himself on the line in such an exercise, but perhaps someone could be invited to highlight, in each one of the themes discussed, the most controversial and opposing views, put them on the table and see what the reactions of the various delegations might be. Then we might have a more lively and really more informal discussion during the second stage, one that would certainly help us prepare for later, formal discussions on specific agenda items and on specific resolutions.

Mr. King (United States of America): I should like to make a point regarding procedure. We have before us now a preliminary draft resolution from the Bureau. Does the Chairman intend to have a more thorough debate on the elements of the preliminary draft, or will the debate we are having now suffice to make any adjustments necessary before the draft is formally submitted?

Further debate that would be good, because perhaps some of us may have some more specific comments on the draft after we have had a chance to look at it more carefully. On the other hand, if the discussion we have had so far is to be considered sufficient, there are a couple of comments I should like to make on the text itself.

The Chairman *(interpretation from Spanish)*: With regard to the point raised by the representative of the United States, I should like to say that the members of the Bureau are still considering the preliminary draft resolution the text of which has been circulated informally to delegations. However, the ideas being put forward this morning and those that will be forthcoming later today will assist the Bureau in preparing the final version of the draft, which will, of course, come out in a timely fashion. Any ideas that may be put forward will be extremely useful to us in preparing the definitive draft text.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): My point is basically the same as that of the representative of the United States, namely, that if we go straight into the submission of this draft resolution we may not have time for the consideration of any specific drafting amendments that may be necessary.

My delegation has also heard just now some amendments that we would like to suggest for consideration; we can make those now. But they will be for the text, before us only, and I will enumerate them.

With reference to the "structural" dimension, the word "structured" should be replaced by the words "informal thematic", so that the phrase would now read "informal thematic discussion of specific items ...".

Concerning deadlines, the words "shall be established" in the preliminary draft give the impression that a discussion on when deadlines should be fixed will start only after the second phase has been completed, which is not the intention of the drafters. I would suggest that the words "be established" should be replaced by the word "come", so that the deadlines "shall come after the end of the second phase".

The draft should also contain a reference to "additional conference room facilities" in the appropriate place.

The drafting changes that we are suggesting do not yet take into account the suggestion by the representative of Mexico. We need guidance from you, Mr. Chairman, as to whether, before the final draft is submitted, you would like to have an informal discussion with some interested delegations as to how that particular idea is to be drafted and inserted, or whether the consensus is that it should be left out. We need some breathing space in which to consider this between now and the actual submission of a draft resolution.

The Chairman *(interpretation from Spanish):* This afternoon we shall be continuing with this exchange of views on general aspects and also in connection with any suggestion that may be made on the informal text circulated to delegations.

Once we have completed this exchange of views in the First Committee, I intend to have an open meeting with delegations wishing to speak so that we can consider the draft in a more structured way, if I can still use that word, so as to prepare the final text to be submitted formally to the Committee.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held at 3 p.m. today. Following it, there will be an open-ended, informal meeting for all delegations interested in considering the informal draft that has been circulated. The informal meeting will be held in Conference Room 8.

I now call on the Secretary of the Committee to make a statement.

Mr. Kheradi (Secretary of the Committee): I should like to inform the Committee that the following countries have become sponsors of the following draft resolutions: A/C.1/49/L.12, United Republic of Tanzania; A/C.1/49/L.23, United States of America; A/C.1/49/L.19, Georgia; A/C.1/49/L.15 and A/C.1/49/L.22, Viet Nam; A/C.1/49/L.25 and A/C.1/49/L.28, United Republic of Tanzania; and A/C.1/49/L.44, Argentina.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.